DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 333 HE 013 841

AUTHOR Porter, John
TITLE Forces That Damage Effective Relationships: State Agencies.
INSTITUTION Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo. Inservice Education Program.; State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.
SPONS AGENCY Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.
REPORT NO IEP-055
PUB DATE Jan 76
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at a Seminar for State Leaders in Postsecondary Education (St. Petersburg, FL, January 1976).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Role; *Cooperation; Educational Finance; Government Role; *Government School Relationship; *Higher Education; *Information Dissemination; Information Needs; *Resource Allocation; *State Agencies; State Aid
IDENTIFIERS *Seminars for State Leaders Postsec Ed (ECS SHEEO)

ABSTRACT

Forces that affect relationships between colleges or universities and state government are considered. It is suggested that the role of the state agency is perceived differently by the various constituencies of the agency. It follows that the definition of effectiveness becomes a changing concept depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. To clarify this issue, the example of the appropriations process is considered. While institutions oppose reduced funding, the legislative and executive branches tend to have a completely different perspective on the resource allocation process. The coordinating board may help the situation by making funding recommendations that require assigning priorities to specific programs in the overall long-range plan. It is proposed that: reporting requirements of colleges and universities should be kept to the essential areas; agencies and institutions should maintain good communication and should present information to each other in understandable, rather than specialized, language; and valid requests for information made by colleges to agencies should be satisfactorily answered, or agencies should assure colleges that information will be provided when possible. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED202333

Inservice Education Program (IEP)

Paper Presented at a Seminar for State Leaders in Postsecondary Education

FORCES THAT DAMAGE EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS - STATE AGENCIES

JOHN PORTER

Alabama Commission on Higher Education

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ECS

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

St. Petersburg, Florida
January 1976

IEP Paper No. 055

LE 013 P41

Education Commission of the States

Inservice Education Program (IEP)
Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

SHEEO

The IEP Program has been supported primarily by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation with additional funds from the Education Commission of the States, the Frost Foundation and the State Higher Education Executive Officers

Forces That Damage Effective Relationships - State Agencies

John Porter

Alabama Commission on Higher Education

In developing these comments I was reminded of one of the corollaries to a commonly observed scientific fact variously known as Murphy's Law, Finnagle's Law or otherwise. It says that if anything can go wrong in an experiment, it will--a general and genteel expression of the contrary and perverse aspects of Mother Nature. Two corollaries have been added to this fundamental law--one that no matter what observation is predicted there will always be someone willing to fake it--the second is more related to the subject today and states that no matter what results are presented there will always be someone willing to misinterpret them. One of the most fundamental forces that works against effective relationships is this--the misinterpretation of ideas, either intentional or unintentional.

It has frequently been stated that state level coordinating boards must exist in a no-man's-land that lies between the institutions and the state offices--legislative and executive. Obviously this can be expanded to a three-sided affair with the coordinating agency in the center of a triangle. To move off-center is to move closer to one side and hence, further from the other side--the agency thus losing, at least momentarily, some effectiveness with the side it has moved away from. This precarious situation is further complicated by the second corollary mentioned above--the misinterpretation of ideas or policies. As indicated earlier, this may be intentional or accidental but it occurs frequently. Specifically, it is that the role of the state agency is

perceived differently by the various constituents of the agency to the end that each constituent has a different perception of the purpose and goals of the agency. The varying perceptions are frequently contradictory and often contradictory or conflicting with the intent and structure of the enabling legislation. This perhaps is fundamentally one of the most damaging forces that there is for state agency relationships since the very definition of effectiveness becomes a changing concept depending on the perspective from which it is viewed.

Let us clarify the problem by an example, realizing that others could be readily provided.

Many state agencies are charged with developing a composite or unified appropriations recommendation for all of postsecondary education that includes the recommendation for each individual institution or system of institutions. These are generally done independently of the individual budget request made by the separate institutions. Needless to say, this funding recommendation is a major tool in the implementation of the state's long-range plan for postsecondary education, the development of which is the state agency's primary function.

Now, from the perspective of the institutions, this recommendation must accurately reflect the needs of the institutions consistent with long-range plans that have been adopted--regardless of cost. If funds are not anticipated to be available, they must be found--or in the last resort, the plans must be changed so as to reduce the need. The latter alternative is generally acceptable to an institution--provided the reduction does not affect the institution.

The Legislative and Executive Branches, however, tend to have a completely different perspective on this problem. Their question is, How can the state coordinating board help solve the financial crisis of the state by reducing the allocations to education and particularly postsecondary education? When the coordinating board recommends a need based sum that is extraordinarily high in relation to funds available, it runs the risk of being totally ignored and hence having the effectiveness enormously reduced insofar as the legislative process is concerned. This problem is acute in many states now where the resources available for education are diminishing and have been in fact decreasing for several years. The logically consistent solution to this problem is for the coordinating board to make recommendations for funding that require decisions to be made assigning priorities to specific programs in the overall long-range plan. Thus, given levels of funding would have specific levels of goal achievement. This, however, flies in the face of political pragmatism since it is easier to treat all alike with constant relative cuts or increases--the egalitarian approach that is also frequently the most politically expedient. It is, however, only in the process of program adjustments that the quality of existing programs can be protected against the diluting effect of expanded program offerings in the face of dwindling resources.

I have no ready solution to the problem other than that suggested. It is not original to my thinking. I do think that it can be accomplished but only through a long process of education--for the public as well as the elected officials and institutions.

There are a large number of other forces perhaps of lesser magnitude that relate to the effectiveness of relationships of state agencies. This quite naturally can be

divided into catagories according to the segment of constituency that they involve, Institutional, Legislative, and Executive. There is, of course, some commonality between the last two and sometimes between all three elements of the constituency.

Institutional

It goes without saying that all information disseminated must be impeccable in its accuracy and based on common definitions for purposes of comparison. There is, however, the danger of imposing an excessive burden on the institutions in the collection of data. Only that which is necessary should be collected and the results of the analysis should be reported or otherwise made visible as soon as possible. It is frequently tempting to ask for information in the "nice to know" category but this temptation must be avoided. The institutions already have an unbelievable burden of reporting.

Another force might be given the short title "surprises". Most often, a surprise means a breakdown in essential communication. It is, of course, a two-way proposition, placing the responsibility equally on all concerned. Unless external circumstances dictate state agencies should not take positions on matters of policy without the involvement of the institutions in the development of the decisions and certainly not without a knowledge of the decisions are prior to public announcement. The converse constraint on the institutions is equally true.

Another problem area relates to the agency's response to expressed needs. This applies to needs expressed by all elements of the constituency, institutional,

legislative, or executive. I am not speaking of financial needs in this context but to the question of providing answers to questions and the formulation of policy in new areas. Occasionally the need expressed will be outside the domain of the agency's role. If so, then this must be clearly indicated. On other occasions, the request will be within the domain of the agency but beyond the abilities of the staff for reasons of resource availability. Again, it should be clearly indicated that the need cannot be met at the present time, that it is a valid need, and that it will be addressed as resources permit.

The Legislature and Executive Office

Aside from the previously mentioned overriding problem of perception of the agency's role, one of the major problems in relating to the legislative and executive offices is again one of communication. Whereas the institutions will have reasonable to great competency in "speaking the language" and understanding what is going on in the state agency, often to the extent of having one or more staff members whose additional duties include relationship with the state agency--the legislature and the governor's office frequently will have no such staff competences. The state agency and its staff are then but somewhat in the position of serving that staff function for these offices while still trying to remain in the no-man's-land. In any case the language of academe or of the agencies must be presented to the other constituencies in the language they understand without in any way giving an appearance of condescension. Their requests for information must be satisfied to their understanding--but the obligation is not yet fulfilled--the agency should take all possible steps to assure that only valid information is requested and that their results are understood. Also,

efforts should be made to insure that the request for valid information is followed up to a conclusion much in the same fashion that I indicated earlier in the follow-up of agency data collection.

While the preceding comments basically relate to the agencies to clear, accurate, and timely responses to the needs of the executive and legislative offices, there is another aspect of these relations that is equally, if not more, important. That is the role of identifying impending problems before they can be identified by others and reach the crisis stage. The pursuit of this approach together with the suggestion of solutions may be one of the best means of improving these relationships.

The above is by no means a complete coverage of the forces that damage effective relationships but do reflect my limited experiences and observations over the past several years and will perhaps provide some thoughts for discussion.

ECS/SHEEO Inservice Education Program
January 28, 1976
St. Petersburg, Florida